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FRANCIS LACASSIN

The Comic Strip and Film Language

The comic strip is now becoming intellectually respectable in somewhat the same way that film did, three or four decades ago. Studies of contemporary strips abound; serious artists are using the form for their own purposes—often, of course, satirical purposes. As the French historian Francis Lacassin argues in the pioneering article below, the “language” or syntax of the comic strip shows many similarities to (and certain historical priorities over) the language of film.

The article has been translated by David Kunzle, author of the forthcoming The Early Comic Strip: Narrative Strips and Picture Stories in the European Broadsheet, c. 1450–1826—a sociocultural history of the first mass medium’s origins—and he adds notes of his own which qualify some of Lacassin’s findings and extend them even further back in time.

There are obvious analogies and intriguing relationships between the various processes of visual narrative known to modern civilization. It is no accident that such film-makers as Federico Fellini, Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, Jacques Rivette, Jean-Luc Godard, Ado Kyrrou, Claude Chabrol, Jacques Rozier, Boileau-Narcejac, Claude Lelouch, Jean-Paul Savignac, and Remo Forlani, not to mention television people, are assiduous readers of comic strips. And we know that Alfred Hitchcock and Henri-Georges Clouzot compose their entire films on paper before shooting them.

ELEMENTS OF A LANGUAGE

The cinema and the comic strip were both born toward the end of the nineteenth century,

Translated from Lacassin’s *Pour un neuvième art: la bande dessinée* (Paris: Union Générale, 1971) and his preceding article “Bande dessinée et langage cinématographique” (*Cinema* ’71, Sept. 1971), by permission of the publishers. The material has been slightly abridged from its longer version in the book, but incorporates the refinements Lacassin made in the book.

and they have experienced a similar initial reception: disdain from the intellectuals, enmity from critics, and immense public acclaim.

In both, the language is composed of a succession of “shots,” (that is to say, images with variable framing) in a syntactical arrangement or *montage*. The comic-strip page demonstrably corresponds to the film sequence, or to the act of a play, except that the background tends to change more often. The daily comic strip of three or four images is comparable to the cinematic scene.

Which of the two arts borrowed this structure, this language, from the other? While the cinema has been for nearly forty years an art recognized and sanctioned by cultural critics, the comic strip was—at least until recently—ignored or scorned. Hence the prevailing tendency to define or analyze the comic strip in terms of cinema, and to see in it the use of “cinematographic” language and editing.

But what if the situation were really the reverse?

The nomenclature of film syntax is well known: long, medium, close-up, high-angle, low-angle, travelling, panoramic shots; special effects for "subjective camera," and so on.

Many devices—above all framing—are of course the exclusive property neither of the cinema nor the comic strip, but characterize the figurative arts in general. Painting has used long and semi-long shots and even close-ups, in the form of details, medallions, and portraits. Engraving and later caricature imposed on the eye and mind that oblong, nearly square format* to which the cinema remained attached until Professor Chrétien developed his anamorphic lens. The originality of the cinema consisted rather in the arrangement and alternation of imagery with variable framing. Yet here too the seventh art seems to have been preceded.

A LANGUAGE INVENTED BEFORE THE CINEMA

Long, group, and medium shots are commonly found in all the nearer ancestors of the comic strip, particularly in popular picture stories such as the *Imagerie d'Epinal*. When the latter utilized little scenes printed together on a single plate, it adopted the medium shot almost exclusively. From 1827 onwards, the Swiss draftsman-writer Rodolphe Töpffer inserted some long shots into the series of medium shots recounting the loves of his M. Vieux Bois. From the time of *Doctor Festus* (1829) Töpffer varied not only the angle of vision, but also the format of each scene.

Heavily influenced by the most recent formal developments in the *Image d'Epinal*, the Frenchman Georges Colomb, alias "Christophe," at first imitated its monotonous presentation: plates composed of rows of an identical number of boxes. Contrary to the *Image d'Epinal*, however, where the upright format of the boxes derives from book-illustrations, Christophe's were horizontal, like those of the cinema screen. Although he tended to favor the medium shot, Christophe

did not hesitate to interpose from time to time absolutely unprecedented framing, like the medium-long shot; and, furthermore he introduced what will later be called the "American" (head to knees) shot, which he used widely and intelligently in "The Fenouillard Family at the Exhibition" (1889), the first episode of the famous series.

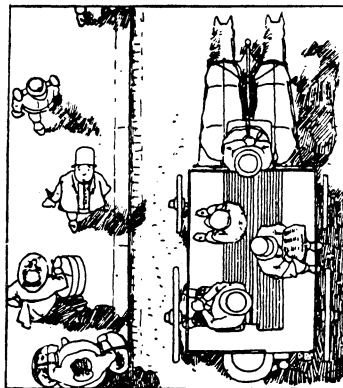
A few weeks later, the description of an excursion to Mont Saint-Michel gave him an opportunity to describe the landscape in a large group shot. In the first episode the father is surprised in the foreground sleeping on a bed, viewed slightly from above. The author had already arrived at a radical application of the latter effect in the form of an aerial view of Paris, when the Fenouillards, visiting the capital, are caught up and lifted away by the anchor of a balloon. As these two examples demonstrate, Christophe was not using the high angle in expressionist fashion, but in his concern for realism. Hence his infrequent use of it. The foreground shot (strangely reserved to the head of the family, to the detriment of the other members) afterwards regularly punctuated the course of his adventures. A few years later, the pimples decorating the nose of the sapper Cambember led the author to show him in medium close-up, but hardly more than three or four times in the space of a few years.

Christophe may also be credited with some other more technically subtle discoveries. Thus night scenes traversed by delightful silhouetted figures (the Fenouillards pursued by the Japanese police) were precursors of those high-contrast and back-lighting effects of art-cinema. In his concern with creating depth by enlarging perspectives, Christophe used figures as repoussoirs, or foreground foils: the Cornouillets seen from the back at the end of a line stretching into the distance; old Fenouillard sitting at the foreground edge of a scene extending as far as the horizon, and in the middleground, the mother and their two daughters. To the same ends, he conceived the perspective of a street, with horses entering from three sides.

In the episode of the Fenouillard odyssey called "With the Papuans," Christophe antici-

*Upright formats were equally favored by these arts, from their inception down to our own day. The reason why film chose a horizontal format (as opposed to the predominantly upright format of its predecessor in still photography) must lie elsewhere.—TR.

A vertical tilt-shot: Christophe's "Second Voyage of the Fenouillard Family"



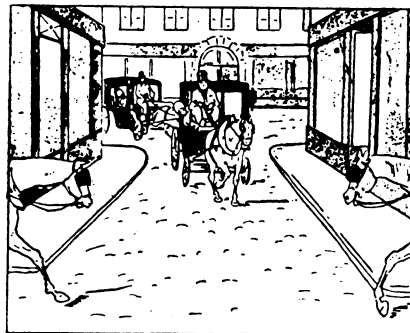
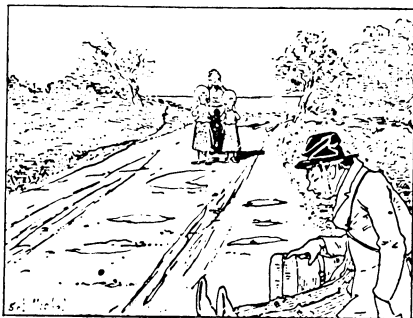
pated the invention of the subjective camera by yielding the floor, or rather the pencil, to one of the daughters, Miss Cunégonde. The latter draws a most hilarious scene in her own clumsy, expressive manner. Similarly, at a later date (before 1914), J-P. Pinchon and Caumery had Bécassine draw in her own racy style certain striking scenes. In the modern comic strip, the American Lee Falk indulged or rather has the natives indulge in exaggerated evocation of the Phantom, whom they revere like a god; the artist rendered them in a childish, naive style. As far as the camera-eye is concerned, the cinema has uncontested priority, for the American strip—the most advanced linguistically—seems not to have practised it before 1945. One of the pioneers in this domain was surely Milton Can-

iff, who used it, from January 1947, in the very first strip of the adventures of Steve Canyon.

This much is certain: it was Christophe who, between 1889 and 1892, discovered all the rudiments—save the extreme close-up and low-angle shots—of a language, which the cinema did not master (and yet claimed to have fathered!) for many years after its birth, November 28, 1895. The American strip scarcely discovered them until 1900–1905, and the French strip was more tardy still.

Thus, in the *Epatant*, for all its novelty-seeking, no medium close-up shot appeared in the adventures of the Nickle-Plated Feet Gang before 1909, when we witness the encounter of a cream pie with the face of Manounou, the wife of Ribouldingue. A few months thereafter Louis

Depth of field in Christophe: "The Fenouillard Family at Mont St-Michel"



Forton made a regular practice of this innovation. He experimented also with the "American" shot, the foreground shot, and depth of field emphasized by repoussoir effects. Having learned to vary the format of the scenes, he finally ventured, in January 1911, his first close-up—perhaps the first in the French comic strip—forestalling the film-maker Louis Feuillade by about two years. Only the insertion of letters and visiting cards, which the spectator had to be able to read, justified for Feuillade the use of so tight a frame, until he finally applied it to the face of the two famous adversaries in *Juve contre Fantomas* (1913).

The extreme close-up was born on a cinema screen. But only the comic strip, mirror of the imaginary, could raise it a fantasy level denied to cinema, mirror of the real. Even with the resources of microphotography, the camera would indeed be incapable of showing as Sy Barry did, in 1964, the silhouette of the Phantom reflected in the pupil of an outlaw terrified at his approach!

But before going on to enlarge its language (as the preceding example testifies) by means of specific adaptation of elements originating in the film, the comic strip seems, once the excitement of first discovery was over, to have entered a period of routine stylistic simplification. An invincible torpor rendered the French-language comic strip, forgetful of the example of its predecessors, incapable of any technical innovation down to 1946, that is until Hergé and the Belgian school made their massive entry. Stranger still, the American strip, from 1905 onwards, led by the Katzenjammer Kids, passively accepted the convenience of the medium shot, which remained the golden rule down to the great turning-point in the thirties.

There is only one explanation for this falling off. The adventure strip, which had a dire need for abrupt cutting, did not appear in America until 1929. Until that time (which coincided more or less with the birth of the talkies in the cinema), comic strip production was entirely dominated by comic characters. Unlike the Nickle-Plated Feet Gang, moreover, they appeared not in magazines but in series of weekly

or daily strips, developing in twelve or four scenes what had previously formed the substance of a single cartoon. The only kind of framing familiar to the latter seems proper also to the "multiple cartoon" of the comic strip. The example of "Blondie," which has not changed in this respect since it was created in 1929 by Chic Young, or that of "Peanuts," with its equally monotonous framing,* are sufficient evidence that even the later American comics production remained rather insensitive to the formal evolution of the adventure story.

Our first conclusion must be: with a few rare exceptions, the comic strip gathered most of its basic expressive resources without recourse to the cinema, and often even before the latter was born. But it would be rash to deduce that the latter is a tributary of the former.

For priority does not necessarily mean influence. It is more reasonable to suppose that comic strip and cinema have both separately drawn the elements of their respective languages from the common stock accumulated in the course of the centuries by the plastic and graphic arts. The comic strip owes its lead over the cinema to the fact that printed pictorial narrative was already mature many years before moving photography was born. It is therefore more judicious to suppose that the two media are autonomous, at least in the technical domain. Elsewhere, they will engage in fruitful exchange, but the hour is not yet come.

A CREATIVE SYNTAX

It is the essence of the cinema to reflect the passage of time, for it is the art of movement, which implies duration. How does the comic strip manage to express these with mere inanimate images? By adjustment of content, framing, format, and by organizing the images in a structure through *montage*. For the film image,

*To cite "Peanuts" as an example of backward technique is misleading because the strip, created in the heyday of the postwar adventure strip, represents (as the UPA cartoons did on the screen) a deliberate rejection of the sophisticated dominant style. The graphic simplicity, or even monotony, of "Peanuts" heightens its psychological finesse.—TR.

as for the drawn image, montage acts as syntax. But montage is not limited to the arrangement of variously framed shots according to a logical order. By manipulating their duration, by changing them around, montage can control dramatic intensity and even invert—like the Russian filmmakers—semantic content. A subjective dramatic logic thus prevails over simple grammatical and formal logic. It can animate excessively static scenes, and concentrate the spectator's attention on, or distract him from, an action. Finally, we know that the process of parallel cutting permits one to follow two actions situated in different places or times. Montage thus plays a truly narrative role within a basic grammatical function.

The comic strip, from the first moments of its existence, experimented with the rudiments of montage, then cast them aside until about 1932–35 when, under the influence of the cinema, it recovered them, and has been improving on them ever since.

Töpffer opened his *M. Vieux Bois* (the story of a lovesick old bachelor) with a few strictly uniform-image pages. But he then quickly disrupted the scene format, making it alternately "short" and "long." The former retains the normal shape (1/6th of the page), the latter occupies the space of two scenes: the graphic lengthening of the image corresponds to the chronologically lengthening of the scene.

By such alteration, the author suggests movement and duration. Here is a three-stage example. A long scene shows how "M. Vieux Bois embraces pastoral life on behalf of the health of the Beloved Object, and takes the provisional name of Tircis." To the left the shepherd Tircis plays the flute at the feet of a gaunt shepherdess; to the right Töpffer includes a dog, a valley, hills, sheep, a tree. Such an image adequately conveys a rural sojourn of some duration. And the following scene, of a brevity underlined by the absence of background, confirms the passage of time, by isolating in a medium shot the two pro-



tagonists in city attire: "M. Vieux Bois returns home, the Beloved Object being sufficiently fat." Third stage (long scene): lateral view of a tree-lined road along which two men walk, carrying the protagonists on a ladder: "M. V.B., finding that his horse has exploded in the meadow, has himself carried."

The first cinemascopic image is intended to convey duration by means of disparate elements and the static character of the description. The last tries to express it by the dynamism already implicit in the notion of a journey and the arrangement of the figures. By placing them in Indian file and in a precise left-to-right succession, Töpffer forces the spectator's eye to run across the image lengthwise, creating the illusion of movement obtained in the cinema by the travelling shot.

By attempting cross-cutting from the very first page of *La Famille Fenouillard*, Christophe was to take montage experimentation even further, despite his rudimentary material. At that time, he had not yet discovered the suggestive power of variation in format. Having devoted two images to the presentation of the shop, and then the family, he recounted in the following four scenes: the bad fall of Artémise from the first story window, beneath the eyes of her mother; the fall of Cunégonde into a well, in the presence of her father; Artémise sucking her thumb on the soft dung-heap where she landed; and a section of the well inside which, caught by a nail in her descent, Cunégonde happily splashes in a bucket.

Christophe thus fused in a simple sequence two incidents which according to the caption took place the same day, but at different times. Even if the comic strip here anticipated what was to become a basic cinematic method, it should not be credited with having originated it, but only with having adapted narrative techniques bequeathed to the serial novel by Eugène Sue and other masters of the genre.*

The page following this experiment is reduced to a single giant image showing in section the comfortable, gleaming drawing-room of the Fenouillards: Monsieur and Madame are dozing in an armchair, rocked by the song which

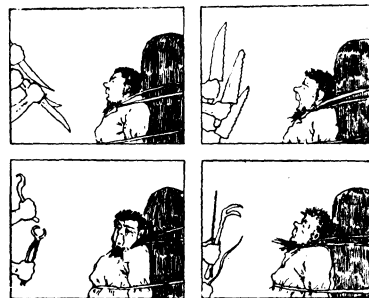
the girls intone as they accompany themselves on the piano: the calm after the storm. Thus the "montage" constructed by Christophe comprises four short scenes and one long one. Subsequently he realized the full creative power of montage, intercutting the sleep of M. Fenouillard resting on a hotel bed with shots describing a tourist excursion of the womenfolk. Cross-cutting here permits him to contrast the philosophical demeanor of the father with the feverish agitation of the mothers and daughters.

One of the later episodes in "Journey to Le Havre" marked definite progress in Christophe's technique; for the first time, he decided to break up an image so as to reduce the time-span that it conveys. The occasion for this innovation was an animated altercation in a Le Havre tram, between the paterfamilias and an Englishman who bumped into Madame and her daughters as he seated himself. The progress of the battle is measured in a long and four short, very craftily alternated scenes, and Christophe devised moreover a use (conventionally comic now, but revolutionary at the time) of the alternating over-the-shoulder shot.

A page from the episode "With the Sioux" testifies to even more remarkable progress in Christophe's understanding of the multiple creative effects of montage. Between two long shots of a torture stake surrounded by screaming and dancing Indians, he inserted an image divided into four equal parts. Each represents Fenouillard in close-up tied to the stake and reacting differently each time he is threatened with a different weapon: dagger, saw, pincers, fork. The page closes on a cinemascopic image which fills the last two compartments, and which, juxtaposed with another of normal format, produces an effect analogous to the cinematic dolly-back shot. The use of three images in different formats was an innovation unsurpassed by even Burne Hogarth in 1950!

*William Hogarth, the supreme master of the satirical picture story in the eighteenth century, had already employed cross-cutting in *Marriage A-la-mode* (1745), in which the fortunes of the married couple are united in scenes 1, 2 and 5, intercut with the separate adventures of the husband (scene 3) and wife (scenes 4 and 6).—TR.

Montage in
Christophe:
"With the
Sioux"



DYNAMIC ILLUSION

In the film as in the comic strip, duration is expressed in two ways, according to whether it measures static time or dynamic time. In the latter, it represents the time span necessary for the unfolding of an action. In the former, it conveys what is called "dead time," that is, intervals irrelevant to the plot, presupposed and unstated, which happen to separate two episodes.

In the film, the illusion of even the most complex movement is produced not only by change in the pose of the figures, but also by change in position of the camera. In manipulation of the image surface the comic strip has discovered a graphic equivalent to even the most complex adjustments in camera-angle. Instead of reproducing a movement in its entirety, which is denied to it by virtue of its two-dimensional universe, it renders the moments of starting and stopping.

One of the oldest examples of "dollying in" in the modern comic strip was furnished by Alex Raymond in a page from "Flash Gordon," dated 8 October 1935. Still somewhat clumsy, it would be barely distinguishable from lateral travelling, were it not followed by a close-up shot. At the far left of a cinemascopic image representing the inside of a cave, stands Flash Gordon on a crag, sword in hand facing us, half clasped by the frightened Queen Azura. He is holding off a handful of warriors placed at the extreme right, below the crag, whose heads and weapons only protrude into the frame. The direction of the movement (southeast, northwest) is clearly indicated by the lower position occupied by the

assailants and their lances pointed in the direction of the hero. It is confirmed by the following image which shows him in close-up, embracing Queen Azura.

This kind of movement was perfected in 1946 by Burne Hogarth, who matched it with a simultaneous change in angle. The point of departure is now with Tarzan on the far left, seen from the back and from slightly below, a woman and two men. One of the latter points to a very long desk at the end of which, far right, an Asian is seated, seen from the front and slightly from above. The Asian is viewed close-up in the next shot. The northwest—southeast direction conforms better to film optics and is easier on the eye. Finally, use of the low angle enabled the draftsman to avoid cheating as Raymond had in representing the figures only in part.

The dolly-back shot, less often used as a rule than the preceding kind, obeys the same laws. Only the order of the images is inverted, the smaller one preceding the longer one. Christophe is doubtless the first to have used it, in the torture stake sequence mentioned above. The first scene shows the head of the family tied to the stake, in a medium shot. The following scene in long-shot, cinemascopic format presents the stake and the prisoner at the extreme right, with the rest of the field occupied by the camp as a whole invaded by soldiers who rout the Indians.

Both Burne Hogarth and Morris (as for example in "The Caravan") make skilful and habitual use of the panorama. This even appears in a rudimentary fashion, in the strip Lee Falk created in the thirties, "Mandrake the Magi-



*Tarzan as
drawn by
Burne Hogarth.*

cian," but with Hogarth the panorama attains a certain psychological finality: violent antagonism, latent anguish, emotional explosion, etc.

MOVEMENT WITH PARODISTIC INTENTION

Just as Hogarth used an unrealistic vision of movement in order to seize our emotions, the comic draftsmen used it parodistically in order to provoke laughter. The American Bill Holman, creator of "Spooky the Cat" and "Smokey Stover" (1935), was surely among the first to apply the idea of making false teeth or ears fly off a person subjected to a violent emotion. In Europe, artists have sent a wig flying in such a case, or else, to express rage, sent the person himself flying, and left him stamping around in space. In Hergé's "Jo et Zette," which is less realistic than his more famous "Tintin," fainting persons leap backwards in space, then free-fall to the ground. Some artists improved on the device by making the fainting character leave his shoes behind, fixed as it were to the ground.

Morris cites a parodistic use of movement typical of "Lucky Luke": "The gunman fires so fast that he drops a bottle, draws, fires, holsters

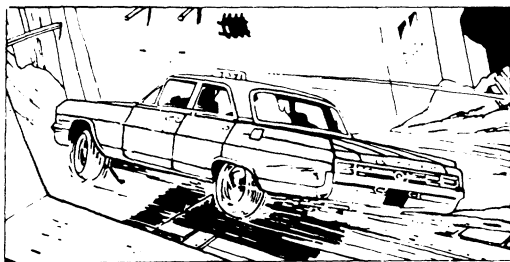
and catches the bottle again before it has time to hit the ground. I maintain that the comic strip expresses more clearly and efficiently a gag like that than any other medium; even the animated cartoon or slow-motion film does not permit the spectator to linger over those three fractions of a second occupied by the gesture of that character."*

The comic strip abbreviates movement, or rather relieves it of certain phases and contracts the time necessary for its execution. The strip can also, as in the above example, expand time for comic purposes.

Exaggeration or hyperbole is sometimes directed at the kinetic energy of movement to which a laughable violence accrues: a spittoon which jumps under the impact of the spittle projected at it, and gives off a metallic ring. Sound effects, especially in onomatopoeic form, are often introduced as comic reinforcement. Similarly ideograms, or certain graphic tricks common to the comic and the dramatic, prolong

*"Profession—draftsman," in *Giff-Wiff*, 16 December 1965.

and underline movement. As Morris puts it, "Parallel lines have no significance in themselves. But place them behind a person or an object and any child will tell you that they are lines of motion. And note this: the longer the lines, the faster the motion. Little arcs, punctuated with little puffs, indicate movement by successive leaps (there is a lot of leaping around in comic strips!)."



Hergé often interlaces these lines under the feet of his characters, in configurations similar to those used on highway signs for dangerous bends, etc. In the adventure strip, lines of motion become little explosive streaks of lightning, when violent impact is to be rendered.

The attitude of the comic strip towards movement is evidently flexible, and ceaselessly evolving. Structurally discontinuous, it may reduce movement to a single phase, thus excluding animation, but in certain situations, particularly in fighting scenes where a single phase and a single picture prove inadequate, the strip is ready to innovate, even to run counter to tradition. As Morris indicates, rapid motion to and fro may be expressed by projecting all the phases of the movement onto the same image: as when a character shakes his opponent, or repeats a gesture in quick succession. This device, typical of the comic genres, has been adapted in a slightly different form by the adventure strip. Instead of just part of the body responding to this linear animation, the outline of the body as a whole may be repeated: Bob Kane uses dotted lines to locate the different positions of Batman as he leaps through the air. Sy Barry gathers in a single image the flashes of a battle between the

Phantom and a bandit. This method supersedes that of Hogarth and other classics, who broke a fight scene down into several images of varying angle and depth.

The most modern adventure strip reveals an increasingly marked preference for contracted as against analytic vision. This is in order to dissociate comic strip technique from that of the film. Certain artists such as Carmine Infantino (who draws "Batman" nowadays) have abandoned the traditional cinema-screen image-shape, in favor of frames cut into long vertical or horizontal slats, which results (among other things) in the radical transformation of movement expression.

Some Supplementary Notes by David Kunzle

This is not the place to quarrel with Lacassin's assumption, which is so widely shared, that the comic strip and cinema were born at the same period. Since the material has simply not been available hitherto, critics cannot know that, in fact, the narrative picture strip reached a certain maturity in German, Dutch, and English broadsheets in the seventeenth century. In my book, which the University of California Press will shortly publish, I reproduce an extensive corpus of these remarkable early picture stories, which will thus become available for analysis and discussion. Nor need we at this point question by what feat of logic Lacassin makes the "birth" of the comic strip postdate by two generations one of the recognized "fathers" of the art (for Gombrich, *the father*), Rodolphe Töpffer. It is true that the weekend supplements of the big American newspapers reached (from 1896) a far wider audience than the European humorous weeklies which had hitherto carried the comic strips; but the basic language of these strips, especially as regards "cinematic" elements, was created earlier—before Christophe, even, whose role is quite properly emphasized by Lacassin, even if his primacy in certain respects is not so extensive as it is made to appear. The purpose of the following is to show how cinematic devices were developed by three major

logical extension into "framing" of the artist's innovation in linear abbreviation, which is based upon the premise, entirely novel at the time although the quintessence of any theory of caricature, that less can say more. To convey the furious rushing to and fro of couriers, Töpffer shows them neatly crossed in mid-picture, with their mounts cut off at the haunches (*Pencil* 50). When the wastrel Albert is repeatedly kicked out by his father, all we see, in an intercut series of very narrow panels, is the fleeing bottom half of Albert and the father's lower leg applied to his rear (*Albert* 8, 9, 12, 14). Later in the same story (23–25), the hero is depicted as a salesman climbing from floor to floor of an apartment building. As he rises we see progressively less of him, and finally at the top or eleventh floor, only a fraction of his coattail and the back of his trousers. Similarly, to convey the repeated toasts to revolutionary ideals, Töpffer shows the hands holding the glass, repeated sixteen times in a diminuendo which also (as in Albert climbing the stairs) rises on the page, as it recedes towards the horizon of vision.

The conclusion to *M. Pencil* could hardly be more cinematic, although on this occasion it conveys the stoppage of time (or its infinity). We see, in close-up against a distant horizon, the telegraph pole of Europe, at last come to rest after so many agitations; then more telegraph poles, also at rest, in a medium-long shot; then the same in a very long shot, taken slightly from above. The "camera" thus pans back to convey the peace at last descending upon the world. The final image also carries the credits.

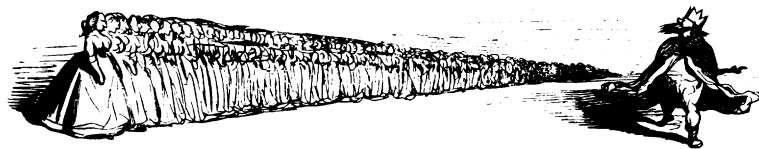
Finally, we may add that the dolly-back shot was not unknown to Töpffer. As the pedant Crâniose harangues M. Crépin (*Crépin* 52), he steps backwards to reinforce the idea that he "recoils at the prospects awaiting society": the camera follows him, leaving the seated Crépin cut off at the knees.

DORÉ

The effect of Gustave Doré's *Histoire de la Sainte Russie* (1854) remains to be measured. Casually sloughing off the burden of strict narrative continuity in a parodistic history which has

all the appearance of being impatiently sketched and patched, but is redolent with mock documentation, the twenty-two-year-old artist is able to break all the rules regarding image format and content. As in Rabelais, whose work he had just illustrated and by whose method (or lack of it) he was profoundly influenced, "fais ce que voudras" is Doré's motto. Anarchy reigns: images vary in number anywhere between one and sixteen per page, in shape anywhere between the very tall, the very broad, the square, the triangle and the lozenge; and are arranged haphazardly so that no two of the one hundred and eight pages look alike. They are "montaged" and captioned to maximize our sense of incongruity and discontinuity, and induce a kind of verbal indigestion and visual vertigo. To take just one page (6) containing seven scenes in seven different shapes: group shot in polar landscape of polar bear, seal and newborn human; medium shot of two penguins; close-up of human head, cut off at the neck; medium shot of figure climbing a mountain; panoramic view of mountains. Typically, Doré follows a cinemascopic view of a densely packed, anonymous army on the march, with a close-up of one or several of its members, highly individualized or else in black silhouette. A baroque battlepiece is followed by a detail shot of lances cutting off heads and limbs; then the same scene, by nocturnal snow-storm; finally the aftermath, in a medium shot of lances and severed heads.

Doré's method of mixed, heavily editorialized narrative opens up a realm of metaphor denied to earlier comic strip artists who are all—even Töpffer—concerned with maintaining narrative on a single level of consciousness. Doré is at once historiographer and cartoonist in content and style. He intersperses the narrative with antipictorial devices (blanks, black spaces, blotches etc.), with the visual realization of appalling puns, with allegories borrowed direct from caricature, and with pictographic inserts which may be described as close-ups reduced to symbolic isolation: to describe the terror under Ivan the Terrible, and the reorganization of the army under Nicholas I, diagrammatic renderings of (respectively) various instruments of tor-



From Doré,
*La Sainte
Russie.*

Après avoir pleuré amèrement, et de son mieux, une existence si injustement éprouvée par le malheur, Vladimir, soudain, se rappelle avec mélancolie que les larmes ne sauraient être les loisirs des grands, et combien d'impérieux et de cruels devoirs sont attachés à la couronne : le mariage en premier, cette abnégation du cœur, cet adieu à l'imprévu, au-devant duquel il marche sans crainte par amour pour les siens. Les plus splendides beautés du pays sont réunies afin qu'il fixe son choix.



Entre les cent son cœur balance.

ture and weapons of war are made to suffice. Doré's pictography takes a decisive step towards the kind of abstraction exploited by the comic strip artists of today, when the interminable series of battles between Peter the Great and Charles XII is encapsulated in repeated rows of smokepuffs.

Among Doré's subjective-camera effects we find the "quotation" of primitive Russian popular imagery, where the artist as it were hands over the pencil to representatives of the people he is describing; and the mock censorship of the full page consisting of a heavy blotch: "let us screw up our eyes so as to see (the reign of Ivan the Terrible) in only the broadest terms." Like the film-maker who varies the contrast or focus according to his subject and the emotional tone he wishes to project, Doré manipulates two basic styles, run parallel and in conjunction: the heavily hatched (à la Daumier), and the lightly sketched (à la Töpffer). It is possible that the silhouette effects, which became so popular in the French comic strip (notably in *Le Chat Noir*, 1880s), even before Christophe, derive from Doré; and that the same artist was the first to use the negative image (white line on black, introduced into *La Sainte Russie*).

BUSCH

Like Töpffer, Busch uses predominantly the medium shot, but interspersed at fairly regular intervals (every dozen or so images) with the

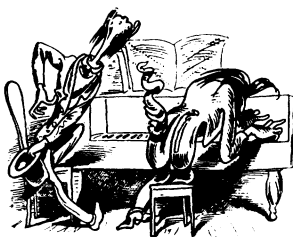
close-up. He rarely pans, being little concerned with décor. In *Max und Moritz* (1863), we see the hen-bait in extreme close-up, below the retreating feet of the pranksters. This is however exceptional in that, unlike Doré, Busch rarely brings objects into sharp focus, reserving such emphasis for the human physiognomy. Thus the shot of the widow Bolte, bust-length in bed, precedes a full-length shot of her standing in consternation at the sight of her hanged hens. Sleeping figures are often shown close-up, with their head thrown back so as to present the least dignified view, all snoring nostril (this could be described as a low-angle shot). On one occasion Busch tells a whole chapter (the second in *Der Geburtstag*, 1873) or even a whole story (*Die Prise*, 1868) with head and bust alone, an idea which can be traced back to Chodowiecki in the late eighteenth century.

Busch's framing is of lesser interest, however, compared with the manifold devices he developed for the rendering of movement, sound, and pain effects. The explosions, which combine all three, are probably best remembered: a pipe filled with gunpowder sends the smoker flying backwards in a vortex of flash-lines; or, better still, in that disgraceful mockery of Parisian sufferings during the siege of 1870–71, Monsieur Jacques fires himself like a cannon-ball out of his boots, straight and spiralling explosion lines marking his trajectory until he splatters onto the ceiling.

If, as Morris reminds us, there is a great deal of leaping in the modern comic strip, there is a great deal of falling in Busch, and to render its violence, Busch hit upon a method remarkably close to and in some ways more effective than the purely conventional disembodied, parallel flash lines used today. He merges the shading, floorboard and wall lines with the figure to suggest sudden plummeting through open space. He also formulated a more conventionalized sign for movement in the comma-like skidmarks used behind the feet of Father Time as he strides through the night (repeated chapter vignettes in *Julchen*, 1877). Body-movement in response to pain is a specialty of Busch—it had to be, for there is so much pain in his work. He can make the agony spiral out of a cut or burned ear (with close-up of ear, *Fipps der Affe* ch. III), reduce the human form to rubber under the shock of a bitter medicine, and, with a somewhat different intent, punish a character by literally shrivelling him to death.

Busch was probably the inventor of an even more fertile device, the "pattern of oscillation,"

described in other terms by Lacassin. Strangely, the German artist arrived at the formula in a mature form as early as 1865 (48 years before Duchamp's famous "Nude descending a Staircase"!), but seldom applied it afterwards, and never to the same effect. The dazzling virtuosity and digital dexterity of Franz Liszt inspired a progressive series of linear distortions and exaggerations: first, the hands at the piano appear to have grown rubber fingers, then they sprout ten fingers each, then the pianist acquires two sets of arms with ten fingers on each of the four hands, and in the *finale furioso*, his whole body is reduced to an arc reaching from one end of the piano to the other, and consisting entirely of the oscillating outline of arms and hands. That which the photographers tried so strenuously to eliminate, became a positive challenge to the graphic artist. The development of the pattern of oscillation is worth a chapter to itself in any history of the comic strip, not least because of its evident relationship with photography, animated cartoon and cinema.



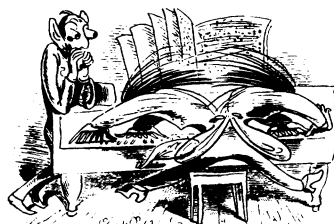
Passaggio chromatico.



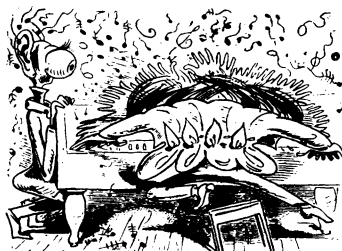
Fuga del diavolo.



Forte vivace.



Fortissimo vivacissimo.



Finale furioso.



Bravo-Bravissimo.